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Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this session on global health and pandemics. This is the fourth time we have had a session on pandemics. The first one was a virtual session in 2020.

Before anything, I would like to thank Thierry de Montbrial. Thank you Thierry, Thank you Madam Kwon, for inviting us and, Madam Minister, warm thanks to the government of the UAE for the wonderful welcome and for hosting this conference.

We have an excellent panel of speakers today, with broad expertise in global health and geopolitics. Before we start, I would like to show one slide for everyone to remember about key figures on Covid 19 as the political attention and the public opinion/attention is rapidly waning, what people call the cycle of “panic and neglect”. We are actually in a phase of neglect.

That is why I entitled this slide, ‘Covid 19: are we being dismissive?’. Let us not forget that the Covid 19 pandemic has been the worst combined health and socioeconomic crisis in living memory. It has infected at least 250 million people across the globe, and the global death toll is estimated to be between 18 million and 33 million people.

At the highest point in the pandemic, 90% of schoolchildren across the world were unable to attend school. At least 150 million people have been pushed to extreme poverty and the economic cost has been huge, estimated by the IMF at being USD 14 trillion to be lost in the period 2024, the toughest shock to the global economy since World War II.

The last point on the slide is that the pandemic is not over, and it continues to have a profound impact on the lives and livelihoods for millions of people with what we call Long Covid. Also, as the economic recovery is taking place in high-income countries, it is still very slow in recovery in the poorest countries.

We will discuss today where we are with regard to the pandemic and pandemic preparedness. The question that is posed today is: ‘Are we ready for a next pandemic?’.